

NICARAGUA
ARAP
Agriculture Reconstruction Assistance
Program

EVALUATION OF PROSPECTS FOR INCREASED
BEEF CATTLE PRODUCTION IN THE NORTH EAST
ATLANTIC AREA

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This area is dominated by a mixture of open grassland and pine forest. The soil is very shallow and fertility is very questionable. The native grasses are not very productive and are of low forage quality. Much of the open grasslands are poorly drained and are not capable of supporting pine trees. There is a hard pan that prevents water from penetrating these soils. This results in an expectation of low carrying capacity of this rangeland. I believe that at least six (6) hectares will be needed per animal unit.

There are about 340,000. hectares of this type of land controlled by indigenous people living in about 60 villages. These villages have the grazing rights to the land around their villages. Before these people were evacuated to Honduras they had larger numbers of cattle. This area now supports about 12,000 head of cattle but could support about 60,000 cattle. The villagers find cattle raising to be profitable but lack the investment to restock their land. They would like to produce more and have the tradition and ability to do so.

There are about 6,000 head of cattle slaughtered annually in the North East Atlantic region. To support this local consumption a cattle herd of 40 to 50 thousand head is required. This region has the ability and the native pasture resource required to be self sufficient in beef production. This region lacks the roads and deep water port required to export beef or cattle. Export markets may exist for cattle from this area but they are not readily evident. It would be difficult to recommend expansion of beef production beyond that required for local consumption.

Several things can be done which will assist these people to become self sufficient in beef production. Test plots of tropically adapted grass and legume species should be planted to determine which species can be grown economically in this region. Soil sampling should be done to determine nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium content of the soil as well as PH, copper and selenium. Mineral nutrition is limiting animal productivity and some information on how to obtain salt and minerals should be made available to the villagers. This area is not being served by any extension activity that I could detect. These producers need to be educated in how to manage their cattle to maximize production and to maintain low cost of production. They lack the ability to invest in supplements and are not being served by animal health professionals.

I believe that this project should arrange for some plot areas (perhaps at the University near Puerto Cabezas) which can have soil samples analyzed and an array of tropical forages planted, At least one cattle producer was trying some introductions of grasses that he had collected from a river bottom location. There would be a strong effect on animal productivity if improved grasses were introduced into this area successfully.

Environmental issues can also be addressed through this search for plants that can thrive in this environment. The thin grass cover is allowing for continued erosion of the small amount of topsoil present in this area.

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